

Gray went on to develop one of the largest and most successful home economics programs in the State of Alabama. She founded the New Homemakers of America (NHA) organization in Conecuh County and the Mother-Daughter-Father-Son organization as a means of bringing families together.

Her insightful programs brought together families to teach them in their own homes a variety of skills from sewing, cooking, decorating, child care, and preserving homegrown foods.

I am pleased to note that due to Mrs. Edith A. Gray's exemplary service she will be honored on December 12 with the office ribbon cutting of the Edith A. Gray Library and Technology Center at Reid State Technical College in Evergreen, Alabama. She is certainly worth of this honor and I extend my personal congratulations to her and her family.

NICS AND MENTALLY ILL

HON. CAROLYN MCCARTHY

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 7, 2005

Mrs. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, for months, I have been discussing how Congress can improve the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) by passing H.R. 1415, the NICS Improvement Act. People who now are barred by current law from possessing a firearm can purchase guns because NICS data is incomplete. The attached article provides more information on why the 109th Congress must pass H.R. 1415.

I want to comment on patient privacy or the stigma of mental illness. The bill contains language directing the Attorney General to work with Federal, State, and local law enforcement and the mental health community to establish protocols for protecting the privacy of information sharing.

My bill does not change current law. The 1968 gun act already bars guns to people "adjudicated as mentally defective or those committed to mental institutions." That is how the law now reads. H.R. 1415 does not change the law.

It is important to remember how the NICS process works. If a NICS search determines that a prospective buyer is barred from getting a gun, then NICS tells the gun dealer that the sale must be "Denied." NICS does not tell the dealer why the purchase is denied. The stigma, if any exists, is that a prospective gun purchaser is denied the gun. Why he was denied does not come into the NICS process.

[From the Hartford Courant, Nov. 27, 2005]

GAPS IN RECORDS ALLOW MENTALLY ILL TO BUY GUNS

(By Mark Sherman)

WASHINGTON.—In Alabama, a man with a history of mental illness killed two police officers with a rifle he bought on Christmas Eve.

In suburban, New York, a schizophrenic walked into a church during Mass and shot to death a priest and a parishioner.

In Texas, a woman taking anti-psychotic medication used a shotgun to kill herself.

Not one of these names was in a database that licensed gun dealers must check before making sales—even though federal law prohibits the mentally ill from purchasing guns.

Most states have privacy laws barring such information from being shared with law en-

forcement. Legislation pending in Congress that has bipartisan support seeks to get more of the disqualifying records in the database.

In addition to mandating the sharing of mental health records, the legislation would require that states improve their computerized record-keeping for felony records and domestic violence restraining orders and convictions, which also are supposed to bar people from purchasing guns.

Similar measures, opposed by some advocates for the mentally ill and gun-rights groups, did not pass Congress in 2002 and 2004.

The FBI, which maintains the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, has not taken a position on the bill, but the bureau is blunt about what adding names to its database would do.

"The availability of this information will save lives," the FBI said in a recent report.

More than 53 million background checks for gun sales have been conducted since 1998, when the NICS replaced a five-day waiting period. More than 850,000 sales have been denied, the FBI reported; in most of those cases, the applicant had a criminal record.

Legislation sponsored by Rep. Carolyn McCarthy, D-N.Y., says millions of records are either missing or incomplete. "The computer is only as good as the information you put in it," McCarthy said.

In the Alabama case, police say Farron Barksdale ambushed the officers as they arrived at the home of his mother in Athens, Ala., on Jan. 2, 2004. Barksdale had been committed involuntarily to mental hospitals on at least two occasions, authorities said.

Facing the death penalty, he has pleaded not guilty and not guilty by reason of mental disease and defect.

The shootings led Alabama lawmakers to share with the FBI the names of people who have been committed involuntarily to mental institutions. But just 20 other states provide NICS at least some names of people with serious mental illness, a disqualifier for gun purchases under federal law since 1968.

Shyla Stewart had been hospitalized five times in Texas, twice by court order. Yet Stewart was able to buy the shotgun that she later used to kill herself at a WalMart in 2003 because Texas considers mental health records confidential.

The same is true in New York, where Peter Troy was twice admitted to mental hospitals but bought a .22-caliber rifle that he used in the shootings inside a Long Island church in March 2002. Troy is serving consecutive life terms for the killings.

As a result of the church shootings, McCarthy and Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., introduced legislation that year to close the gaps in the background check system. The bill would have required the states to give the FBI their records and provided \$250 million in grants to cover their costs.

The bill passed the House without opposition but stalled in the Senate. In 2004, the measure again had the support of lawmakers who support gun rights, but it did not pass Congress.

McCarthy, whose husband was among six people shot to death on a Long Island Rail Road train in 1993, has introduced it again this year, but it has not yet been taken up by a House Judiciary subcommittee.

Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, a National Rifle Association board member, was a sponsor of the bill in the last Congress and continues to support it, spokesman Dan Whiting said. The NRA supports the concept, but it has not taken a position on McCarthy's legislation, spokesman Andrew Arulanandam said.

Michael Faenza, president and Chief executive of the National Mental Health Association, said forcing states to share information

on the mentally ill would violate patient privacy and contribute to the stigma they face.

It's just not fair. On the one hand, we want there to be very limited access to guns," Faenza said. "But here you're singling out people because of a medical condition and denying them rights held by everyone else."

The states that provide some or all mental health records are Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming.

HONORING TOWN STEFFAN RETIRING SUPERVISOR MARK CONCORD STEFFAN

HON. BRIAN HIGGINS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 7, 2005

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor a man whose years of service, both as a councilman, and for the last 4 years as Supervisor of the town of Concord, have served his town admirably. Today, I want to honor retiring Concord Town Supervisor Mark Steffan.

Mark Steffan is someone who loved his town with every fiber of his being. A successful businessman, Mark was elected to the Concord Town Board and his recent service as Supervisor has come at a time when more people in Erie County and western New York look to the town of Concord and its incorporated village of Springville as an outstanding place to live, work and raise a family. It is that way because of the dedicated service of public officials like Mark Steffan.

Mark Steffan and his family are moving on with a planned move out of western New York. I want to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to commend Mark Steffan for his service to the residents and the taxpayers of the Town of Concord, and remind him that local residents are better for the service he provided to town government.

CONGRATULATING MR. PETER A. TAMILIN

HON. TOM DAVIS

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 7, 2005

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Mr. Peter A. Tamilin on his achievements in public service by serving the United States Army for over 33 years.

Mr. Tamilin began his civil service career as an engineer-in-training in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1972. He held positions of progressive responsibility as a civil engineer in the Walter Reed Area Office, the Baltimore District and the Europe District, and began serving at Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1990. In 2002, Mr. Tamilin moved to his current position as the assistant for construction in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army Installations and Housing, Assistant Secretary of the Army, Installations and Environment. As assistant for construction, he has been an invaluable asset in the development and issuance of installation policy with focus on Military Construction